



Photo by Martin's Photo Shop

Long, long ago: Pictured in front of the Hungarian Hall are (from left) Rose Ferency, Helen Jozsa, Elizabeth Chervencko, Bill Szabo, Helen Adams, Elizabeth Szabo, Mary E. Miller and Irene Kosco Hauser. The date the photo was taken is unknown.

Global



Heritage

The series

In a seven-part series that began Aug. 16 and runs in the Sunday Tribune-Star, the newspaper explores Terre Haute's rich ethnic history, focusing on six groups whose legacies are still visible and viable today.

Today — The Hungarians: About 1900, a new neighborhood began to form around an equally new plant — the Terre Haute Malleable and Manufacturing Co.

Sept. 20 — The Syrians: The first Syrian to arrive in Terre Haute, Kaleel Hanna, came in 1902. He was originally from Ina Isha'ara, and eventually 17 families came to Terre Haute from Ina Isha'ara.

Sept. 27 — The Indians: Natives of India began moving to Terre Haute in the 1960s after federal immigration laws removed the quota systems.

The Hungarians

Hope arises from 'Living the American Dream'

By Tammy Ayer

Tribune-Star

The little trunk shows the scars of rough travel and the passage of decades, with dull metal fittings and pieces missing from the puzzle of black paint on its riveted metal finish.

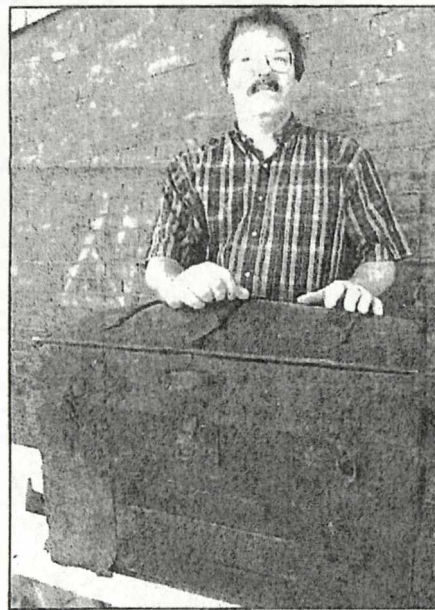
For most, the rusty trunk doesn't merit a second glance. But its owner, Steve Kostyo of Terre Haute, looks at it and sees 1906 and his grandfather as a young man of 16 carrying it aboard a massive ship after leaving Hungary for the United States, a country he had never seen before.

The day he left home, Frank Kostyo's mother made him a couple of sandwiches, which he placed in that trunk along with his birth certificate, a few other pieces of important paperwork and some clothing.

Perhaps then she took his face in her hands, as mothers will, and told him to be careful, and he reminded her he would return in a few years with enough money to buy a farm of his own. He didn't think it would take long, said his son, Joe Kostyo.

Eventually, Frank Kostyo made his mark on Terre Haute history as the owner of a longtime soft drink bottling plant that eventually employed several drivers after opening for business as a one-man operation in 1920. But he never saw his mother again.

Today, his son and grandson and other Hungarians celebrate their heritage with special events like an annual fall Harvest Dance at the Hungarian Working Men's Society Hall, 2049



Heirloom: Steve Kostyo of Terre Haute shows the trunk his grandfather (above) Frank Kostyo used when he was 16 to carry items aboard a ship after leaving Hungary for the United States. Before Frank Kostyo died at age 96, he gave his grandson the trunk.

Tribune-Star/Jim Avella

N. 22nd St. The brick building is an important landmark of the city's old Hungarian neighborhood and a vital link in today's more scattered Hungarian community.

Hungarians came to the United States in noticeable numbers in three waves — after the 1848 revolution led

by Lajos (Louis) Kossuth against the Hapsburg Empire, after the unsuccessful uprising against the Communists in the fall of 1956 and from 1880 to 1920, the biggest wave by far.

That biggest wave created Terre Haute's Hungarian neighborhood, which grew up around the Malleable and Manufacturing Co. plant at 2030 N. 19th St., a sprawling, sweating, screeching jungle of hulking machinery and the humans who operated it.

The history of the city's Hungarian community paralleled that of the company, incorporated in 1906. Hardware salesman Albert W. Wagner and Henry Wanner created the company because they were unable to get good quality malleable iron, the firm's president said in 1985, the year the plant closed.

Wagner and Wanner hired Leonard M. Eyke, a young foundryman, and built the plant on the foundation of several small foundries already in the area. Eyke hired Eastern Europeans and African-Americans in addition to Magyars, as native Hungarians are called.

It was Eyke who contacted Lucille Wilkinson Nyers' in-laws, John and Julia Nyers, and urged them to come to Terre Haute. Married in Hungary, they left Budapest — separately — in 1902. John Nyers got settled in Joliet, Ill., before sending for his young wife.

The couple moved to Terre Haute about 1905 after Eyke contacted them and told them about jobs available at

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the Malleable, she added. John Nyers then got a job there, while his wife opened a grocery store at the southwest corner of 21st and Linden streets. The family later built another store at 19th Street and Maple Avenue.

In 1920, John Nyers died after a scratch became infected, poisoning his arm. That year, son Stephen, about 16, had to leave school to help his mother run the store, and she bought the building Lucille Nyers still lives in, at 1640 Maple Ave.

That structure, built around 1900 as a tavern, was the original gathering place of the city's Hungarians, Nyers says proudly. "The concrete is still out there where they had the dance hall," she said.

Down the street, at 2141 Maple Ave., a mule clutch of bells hangs above the door of a neighborhood grocery store that closed in 1973. But Helen Gall, 87, still lives in the back part of the structure that her father, Daniel Gall, built in 1928 for \$12,000. Her father, a burly man whose son Alexander became a football star at Germantown High School, had left Budapest like his wife, Helen Gurey Gall. She emigrated to the United States after seeing ads in European newspapers from Americans seeking domestic help, and they met and married in Pennsylvania in 1909.

The Galls arrived in Terre Haute around 1915 after hearing of the jobs available, and Daniel Gall got a job at the Malleable plant. When he learned a building across the street from the plant was for sale for \$800, he borrowed the money and in 1922 opened a store there. That building is gone, but his second store looks as if it might reopen any minute. One broad glass window reads "Gall Vegetables," a misspelling Gall still

points out with glee, and a small sign inside declares, "Don't Just Stand There, Buy Something!"

To the south, past the home of sister Irene Pascock, neighbor Helen Jozsa, 77, lives in the tidy house that her parents, Gabriel and Agnes Laszko Jozsa, bought in 1933. The Hungarian natives met while he boarded at her sister's home, after he had gotten a job at age 18 at the Malleable, and married in 1913. He worked at the plant for 80 years.

There was a time when Jozsa, like nearly everyone in the neighborhood, could speak Hungarian, and secretaries of the lodge — formed on July 30, 1909, by 31 Hungarian families — took the minutes in Hungarian. Though Jozsa no longer speaks Hungarian, Gall can.

Elizabeth Barath Czeako is another of the few remaining members of Terre Haute Hungarian community who can speak the language. Now 90, she was 3 years old when her parents, John and Marie Dupak Barath, left the small Hungarian town of Csoka for St. Louis and left her with her maternal grandmother.

Czeako's mother went back for her and brought her to the United States when she was 6, and the family moved to Terre Haute in 1920. After her father worked in the Malleable for several years, he built a brick tavern at 1801-1805 N. 19th St. in 1930. Called John's Tavern, the structure had 16 small sleeping rooms for newly arrived Hungarians and boarders. It remained in the family until 1970, when Czeako and her husband John, a Cleveland native, sold the structure.

The Hungarian neighborhood, also known as a Democratic stronghold, was a tough place to get away with anything, said Charles Alexander Toth, 51, a City Council member who grew

up there. He was about 8 when he and a group of neighborhood boys stood in a tight circle in an alley, smoking a cigarette. A man heading home from the Malleable, lunch box swinging in his hand, never stopped as he walked by. But when Toth got home, he got a scolding.

For Frank Kostyo, that neighborhood of gardens and grape arbors was the catalyst that launched his American success story, a story that began when a man who ran a small bottling plant near the Malleable couldn't repay a loan Kostyo had given him, said his son, Joe Kostyo, 77.

Instead, the man gave Frank Kostyo his bottling equipment — a foot-powered machine that handled one bottle at a time. In 1920 Kostyo started out in the business by himself, bottling the pop and rising early each morning to make the rounds of neighborhood stores and taverns all over town.

The business grew to three trucks and out of the building at 1937 Ash St., moving to 2055 N. 13th St. and later selling franchise drinks like Nesbit, Hires, Squire and Dr. Pepper.

Once, after Frank Kostyo gave his grandson the trunk on a rainy day about a year before he died at age 98 in 1985, Steve Kostyo thought he would smooth the rust, restore the paint, fix the fraying paper liner inside. He's changed his mind about that.

"Through that trunk is where we are today. Without him taking that big step, my dad wouldn't have had the life he had," Kostyo said. "The American Dream is there, and he lived it."

Joseph Eugene "Gene" Chernay

Chernay, 87, is the grandson of Steve and Julia Chernay, who married in their teens while still in Hungary. She worked as a servant in a large Budapest hotel that catered to a wealthy trade — a job that required her to speak several languages, among them German, Italian and Polish — while her husband was a master carpenter. They moved to the United States and settled in Dayton, Ohio, where they ran a small grocery store for a few years. While in Dayton, where Gene Chernay's father, Guy, was born, they were contacted by an acquaintance who worked at the Malleable plant. The couple made the move in 1908, opening a store in a one-room house across the dirt street from the entrance to the Malleable plant. The store, later called Chernay's Grocery and Meat Market, then Chernay and Son, prospered, eventually becoming the biggest in the Hungarian neighborhood. Chernay worked in the store at 2051 N. 19th St. at different times and ran it from 1930 until it closed in 1975. Chernay is a former Terre Haute City Council member, having served from 1969-72.

John Ferency

Ferency, 81, was born in Terre Haute's Hungarian neighborhood, the son of Steve and Susan Almásy Ferency. His father, a cobbler, was from Budapest, while his mother was from a village in Austria-Hungary. They met while traveling on the ship to the United States, and married in Union City, Conn., in January 1909; both were teens at the time. They then moved from New York to Cleveland, then to Toledo, Ohio, and Indianapolis before settling in Terre Haute, where his

father worked at the Malleable plant while his mother took in boarders. The couple had 12 children; Ferency and brother Alex, both still residents of the Hungarian neighborhood, are the only two living. For 59 years, John Ferency has been married to Rose Elizabeth Szabo, whom he met while growing up in Terre Haute's Hungarian neighborhood.

Minnie Boytos Michli

Michli, 79, was born in Roebing, N.J., the daughter of Alex Boytos and Grace Toth Boytos. The couple settled there because of a large wire mill where many Hungarians and other eastern European immigrants worked. Her parents, both from Hungary, married in Roebing; Grace Boytos was 15 at the time, then had her daughter two years later and died at age 19 of pneumonia. At age 13, Michli moved to Terre Haute to live with her maternal grandmother, Anna Homya. Michli worked at the Malleable plant for 20 years as a cookmaker, leaving the plant in 1982. Her husband Joseph — whom she married at Sacred Heart in 1936 — worked there 40 years. Born in Hungary, he arrived in the United States at age 8 months after crossing the ocean on the Red Star Line. Minnie Michli had lived in her home in the old Hungarian neighborhood since 1934, in the same home her maternal grandparents lived in, but recently moved out of state to live with her daughter.

John Vircsak

Vircsak was the first president of the Hungarian Social and Benevolent Society of Terre Haute, formed by 31 Hungarian families on July 30, 1909, to render assistance to fellow Hungarians faced with misfortune. Other original officers included Vice President

John Benack, Secretary Steve Biel and Treasurer John Hanko. The current president is Charles Greaser, along with Vice President Ada Kukuras, Secretary Rita Waidell, Treasurer Kathy Miller and Financial Secretary Janet Klepiz. The Hungarian lodge is at 2048 N. 22nd St. and has approximately 80 members, about 70 of whom are of Hungarian descent.

Margit Steindl Treiber

Born in Hodmezovassarhely, Hungary, Treiber, 70, graduated from gymnasium — the equivalent of junior college — at age 18 and then went to Budapest, where she was accepted at the prestigious Hungarian Royal Physical Education Academy. Upon her graduation four years later, she got a job in Budapest teaching high school physical education, along with coaching gymnastics for girls and volleyball for boys. In 1956, Hungarians began to chafe under the rule of the Communists, who quickly stopped the burgeoning revolution in October, that prompted Treiber to cross the border with Austria under cover of night in late November because there was no hope at all to leave the terror the Stal in era caused, she said. Treiber arrived in the United States in January 1957, settled in Allentown, Pa., where she taught at the Arthur Murray school of dance. She moved to Terre Haute in 1959, choosing it because it is the Crossroads of America, the birthplace of Theodore Dreiser and there was symphony orchestra, she said. She started teaching at Indiana State University part time in 1958 as a graduate fellow and became a full-time member of the physical education staff in 1962. She continues working there today, and is a member of the U.S. Gymnastics Hall of Fame.

Hungarians and their experiences